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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAMAKO 000820

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STATE FOR AF PDAS DON YAMAMOTO AND DAS WILLIAM FITZGERALD
FROM THE AMBASSADOR
OSD FOR DASD VICKIE HUDDLESTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/17/2019

TAGS: MARR ML PINR PTER
SUBJECT: MALIAN MILITARY COULD MAKE GOOD USE OF CESSNA
CARAVANS

Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador Gillian A. Milovanovic, for reasons 1.4 (b) (d).

¶1. (C) I understand questions have arisen regarding funding of two Cessna Caravan surveillance/transport aircraft to Mali. This is the second year Embassy Bamako has requested support for this program. It remains, we believe, a vital step toward Malian efforts to regain control of the vast, under-governed areas of northern Mali and facilitates the defeat of violent extremist organizations which thwart key U.S. goals of democratization and regional development. These efforts will take time and, therefore, require resources, sustained incremental assistance and training, and patience on the part of the U.S. Government.

¶2. (C) Over the last several months, the U.S. Government has provided over 40 trucks, 50 radios or radio systems, and over USD 4 million in vehicle spare parts, life support equipment, fuel, food, and individual soldier equipment to provide a minimum of the basics needed to improve the ground maneuver capacity of specific elements of the Malian Army. Given the starting point, this represents a tremendous boost to Malian military capacity and will go a long way towards helping them begin to provide security in the North, including in the fight against AQIM. In order to give the Malian Army the tactical advantage -- something we would insist on for our own troops -- these aircraft are needed. They would provide the Malians with over-the-horizon visibility to better locate the enemy and avoid running into ambushes. Surveillance capacity ties in with the additional capabilities we hope to provide the Malian military through the Military Intelligence (MI) Train and Equip program funded for FY10. The MI program will train an analytical cell to use information from a variety of sources, and one important method for collecting useful information would be aerial surveillance via the Cessna Caravans. While the U.S. Government currently provides some such information via the Creeksand aircraft, the release requirements remain sufficiently cumbersome to render the information of little utility. My goal is to assist them with timely, actionable intelligence rather than historical information, which is better used for archiving than for guiding operations.

¶3. (C) These aircraft would also allow the Malian military to resupply their soldiers either by landing and offloading the supplies or by conducting an airdrop. The U.S. military did an airdrop resupply of food and water to Malian troops in contact in 2008, with the US. aircraft taking rounds from ground fire. Adding this capability to the Malian Air Force would be a significant force multiplier and would reduce the

likelihood of the need for requests for similar support from the United States.

14. (C) I believe that, given their capacity constraints, Mali's track record with respect to aircraft maintenance is good. In 1994, the United States provided the Malian Air Force with three Cessna O-2 observation aircraft. These planes were Vietnam-era aircraft that the U.S. military no longer wanted, in part because they were deemed to be too expensive to maintain. However, nearly 40 years after they went into service, and 15 years after arriving in Mali, one of the aircraft is still flyable, and another could be with relatively minor repairs. Given our records showing that one of the airplanes was not even flyable when the Malians received it, I would submit that this is a pretty good showing. The Basler BT-67 (C-47) that Mali received from the United States in the 1990s is another good example: the Malian Air Force keeps it flying and uses it regularly. While U.S. Foreign Military Financing (FMF) has helped with spare parts acquisition, Mali has received no FMF monies in the last several years, so if the plane is still flying, it is primarily the Malian Air Force that deserves the credit. We have multiple Mil-to-Mil events scheduled with the Malian Air Force in the second quarter of FY 2010, focusing on maintenance and logistics management.

15. (C) Looking at basic cost-benefit, we believe that keeping the Cessna O-2s and the Basler BT-67 airborne rather than purchasing new aircraft is penny-wise, pound-foolish. The Cessna O-2s do not have the range to support the ground troops in contact in the North of Mali, nor do they offer the transport capability of the Cessna Caravan. The BT-67 has such range and carrying capability but remains very expensive to operate.

16. (C) Concerns that the Malian military use the aircraft against Tuareg rebels are real, but likely disproportionate. The Tuareg rebellion has largely subsided over the last year, and the primary threat to development in the North remains AQIM. The President has repeatedly recognized this new reality in meetings with senior U.S. Administration officials and in conversations with me. Additionally, the overall record of the Malian government approach to handling Tuareg rebellions has been one of seeking compromise through discussion and negotiation. Military action has been a limited instrument of last resort, not the method of choice. We do not see indications that this approach is likely to change.

17. (C) If we want to help the Malian Army provide security in the North so that the people there can benefit from the assistance in economic growth, health, education and governance resources like the rest of the nation, providing two Cessna Caravans with appropriate sensors, a training package, and a spare parts package via 1206 funding is a step in the right direction. Compared with FMF funding, which as noted has been non-existent in recent history, 1206 funding will get the airplanes in Malian hands sooner. If FMF is secured it could then help support spare parts purchases in the future, as was programmed in the FMF request submitted for FY 2011 and 2012.

18. (C) For all of the above reasons, I urge the interagency to take a good look at funding the Cessna Caravans for Mali.

MILOVANOVIC